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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to identify classes of characteristics cited by education students (N=54) at the University of Botswana as contributing to the perceived effectiveness or ineffectiveness of their own primary school teachers. Respondents provided demographic information about themselves and the identified teachers, and they rank-ordered 14 different teacher characteristics in 1 of 3 classes of teacher variables (personality/relationship, instruction, or class management) in terms of the contribution of these variables to the perceived effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the identified teachers. Open-ended responses about factors which contributed toward effectiveness or ineffectiveness were also solicited. The pattern of the responses is compared by age, sex, teaching experience, and level of qualifications of the primary school teachers and by the characteristics of the respondents. A summary of generalizations made on the basis of the findings suggests that knowledge of subject and an ability to present good lessons are at the heart of good teaching; however, the absence of appropriate personality or relationship skills precludes the perception of instructional competence. Whether or not questions were asked in a forced-choice or free-response format appeared to influence the nature of the responses. Eight tables display questionnaire results in tabular form. (Contains 20 references.) (Author/LL)

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In Search of Good Teaching: Perceptions of Teachers in Botswana

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Abstract:

This study seeks to identify classes of characteristics which were cited by education students at the University of Botswana as contributing toward the perceived effectiveness or ineffectiveness of their own primary school teachers. In addition to providing demographic information about themselves, and about the teachers which they had identified, 14 different teacher characteristics in one of three classes of teacher characteristic variables (personality/relationship, instruction or class management) were rank ordered in terms of their contribution to the perceived effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the identified teachers. Open-ended responses about factors which contributed toward effectiveness or ineffectiveness were also solicited.

The pattern of the responses are compared by age, sex, teaching experience and level of qualifications of the primary school teachers and by the characteristics of the respondents. The rankings of teacher characteristics obtained by the open-ended questions is compared with that obtained by structured response format. Conclusions provide a fairly clear picture of the demographic description of the perceived effective teacher and suggest that the classes of variables are inter-related. Whether or not questions were asked in a forced-choice or free-response format appeared to influence the nature of the responses.

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Note: The author was a member of the Faculty of Education at the University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana at the time this study was conducted.

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The search for factors which affect school performance in developing countries has continued to move forward during the decade (see e.g. Avlos & Haddad, 1981; Fuller, 1987; Fuller and Snyder, 1991; Heyneman, et al, 1983; Heyneman, 1976; Mwamwenda & Mwamwenda, 1987; Yoder, 1989; to name only a few) few need to be convinced that the classroom teacher occupies a key role in effecting whatever it is that determines "school quality". So long as schools have teachers many, if not most, efforts at school improvement will, in the end and to a greater or lesser extent, require the teacher to implement them and will thus be constrained by the extent to which which the individual teacher is willing or able to do so.

The debates about what constitutes good teaching are on-going and perennial. On the one hand, there are those who argue that teaching is, first of all, an "art" (see e.g. Eisner, 1983), while others prefer to use the language of "science" (e.g. Baker, 1984). More generally, it would appear that three broadly defined, though over lapping, views of teaching improvement may be defined from the accumulated research and literature on teaching. There is first of all the preponderate literature which focuses on instructional matters and teaching methodologies. Here, the essence of effective teaching appears to be in the arena broadly defined as instruction, with a resultant focus on teaching strategies and methods. The general assumption made in this literature is that to be that the better teacher is the one who has selected and implemented the best *method* or approach for the subject and class at hand (see e.g. Kourilsky & Quaranta, 1987; Hudgins, 1970, Orlich, et al,1985).

A second broad tradition in improvement of teaching is represented by those who focus on techniques for classroom management, discipline and establishing a positive classroom environment (see e.g. Asiedu-Akrofi,1981; Hurt, et al, 1978; Talmage, et al, 1984; Veenman, 1984). While this tradition does not discount the importance of good instruction it nevertheless assumes that the climate which prevails in a classroom will have a determining impact on the effectiveness of the instruction which takes place there.

The third broad tradition is that which focuses on the the teacher as a person and on the relationships which they develop with the students (see e.g. Brophy & Good, 1974; Maslow, 1954; Youngs, et al, 1970). Hawkins, et al (1988), for example, investigated conditions under which the "social bonding" of low achieving students in could be improved; the assumption being that improved social bonding should lead to improved teaching. (The so-called "Humanistic Education Movement" with roots variously traced to Dewey (1933), Neill (1960), Holt (1964), Goodman (1964), Kozol (1967) and Rogers (1969) and others should doubtless also be included in this broad tradition, though there is obvious overlap with some of the others.) The working premise here is that the teacher as a person and the relationship which s/he develops with the students is a critical component effectiveness, though it might be observed in passing that many of these persons would unhappy with a definition of school effectiveness which focussed mainly on the academic.

Purpose of the study

The literature on improvement of teaching in the context of developing countries is less readily available and has tended to focus on the more easily quantifiable aspects such as years of experience, type of teaching qualification or salaries (see, e.g. Fuller 1987). More importantly, few studies carried out in developing countries explicitly consider the *local* context when evaluating the effect of teaching practices. However, pedagogy is not context or culture free and it would seem careless, at best, to assume (even implicitly) that it's "truths" can be transplanted

from one cultural and social context to another with impunity. Efforts to improve teaching in developing countries must be informed by research that is explicitly concerned with developing an understanding of the social and cultural perceptions and practices within which education takes place.

This study is an investigation of the ways in which education students enrolled at the University of Botswana perceive the teachers who taught them while they were in primary school. More specifically, it investigates a number of characteristics which these students associate with teachers they remember as particularly effective or ineffective, and explores the extent to which certain remembered teacher characteristics are believed to have contributed toward those perceptions. The study is premised on the assumption that the remembered perceptions of students can provide insight into those characteristics that, for what ever reason, are valued (or not valued as the case may be) in teachers in that context.

The study is exploratory and is intended to stimulate further research as well as providing insight which may prove useful to those who are concerned with the improvement of education in similar settings.

Methodology

Sample

Participants

The fifty-four participants in the study were students enroled in a degree programme in the Department of Primary Education at the University of Botswana. All were experienced primary school teachers and held a Primary Teaching qualification. More than three fourths (77%) of the respondents gave their highest level of secondary school education as the Junior Certificate (i.e. 2 to 3 years of secondary schooling) while the remaining twenty-three percent had successfully completed the General Certificate of Education (equivalent to 4 to 5 years of secondary schooling).

Nineteen of the respondents were in the first year of the programme at the university while twenty-one and fourteen were in their third and fourth years respectively. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents were female and eighty-seven percent of the total indicated that they were between 30 and 49 years of age.

Instrumentation

A two-part questionnaire, each with three sections, requested respondents, first of all, to mentally identify, among their own primary school teachers, the specific teacher whom they considered to have been the most "effective" ("effectiveness" was not explicitly defined). Demographic information about the selected (i.e. remembered) teacher included sex, the standard (grade) which they had taught, the teacher's approximate age at that time, whether or not they thought the he or she was a qualified teacher and, if so, at what level.

Second, respondents were asked to rank-order fourteen different teacher characteristics (or teaching skills) in terms of the importance in their own minds, of each toward making this particular teacher especially effective. Finally, respondents were invited to make a free response on what it was that, in their opinion, made this teacher effective.

For the second section, respondents were asked to completely repeat the previous process, but this time with reference to their most *ineffective* teacher.

The teacher characteristics or skills which were ranked by the respondents consisted of fourteen statements, each of which could be clustered into one of three groupings, or categories, of teaching characteristics corresponding to the three broad "improvement of teaching" traditions noted above. These were Instruction variables (five) Personality/Relationship variables (five) and Class Management variables (four). The statements were presented in random order on the questionnaire. The same fourteen characteristics were presented twice; once for ranking the effective teachers and again for ranking the

ineffective teachers. For the effective teachers, the statements were usually presented in a positive form while for the ineffective teachers, the statements were presented in a negative form where appropriate.

Findings

Descriptive / Demographic

Each of the demographic variables included in the study yielded a statistically significant result ($p = <.05$) for comparisons between effective and ineffective teachers. Tables One through Five show these results.

Taole One

Percentage of Effective
and Ineffective Teachers
by Sex

	Effective		Ineffective		Total
	N	Percent of Column	N	Percent of Column	
Male	41	75.9%	26	50.0%	67
Female	13	24.1%	26	50.0%	49
Total	54	100%	52	100%	106

p = < .01

From Table One it can be seen that the respondents are more likely to have remembered their most effective teachers to be male while their most ineffective teachers are about equally likely to have been remembered as male or female. It should be noted that a contingency table analysis (x^2) for effect of Respondent's Sex on Sex of Teacher (either as effective or ineffective) yielded insignificant results.

Table Two

Percentage of Effective
and Ineffective Teachers
by Standard Taught

Standard Taught	Effective N	Effective Percent of Column	Ineffective N	Ineffective Percent of Column	Total
1	3	5.9%	4	8.0%	7
2	0	0%	2	4.0%	2
3	2	3.9%	12	24.0%	14
4	6	11.8%	13	26.0%	19
5	10	19.6%	6	12.0%	16
6	8	15.7%	8	16.0%	16
7	22	43.1%	5	10.0%	27
Totals	51	100%	50	100%	101

$p = <.001$

As can be seen from Table Two, more of the effective teachers were teaching in standard seven than in any other standard. Thirty of the fifty-one effective teachers were teaching in either of the two highest standards. The ineffective teachers, on the other hand, tended to be grouped in standards three and four. It is understood that many primary school administrators in Botswana tend to assign their "better" teachers to the upper standards (especially standard seven) and their "poorer" teachers to the middle standards. The pattern of effective and ineffective teachers indicated by these respondents suggest that there may be agreement between the students' evaluation of teachers and that of the administrators.

Table Three

Percentage of Effective and Ineffective Teachers by Age Group

Age	Effective		Ineffective		Total
	N	Percent of Column	N	Percent of Column	
20-29	0	0	0	0	0
30-39	5	9.4%	14	27.5%	19
40-49	34	64.2%	20	39.2%	54
50-59	14	26.4%	17	33.3%	31
Totals	53	100%	51	100%	104

$p = <.05$

Table Three suggests that there is some tendency for the effective teachers to be older than the ineffective ones. Almost two thirds of the effective teachers were remembered as being between 40 and 49 years old while a relatively larger proportion of the ineffective teachers fell in either the younger or older groups. Since it would normally be expected that the age of the teachers is positively related to years of experience this finding suggests that the more effective teachers are likely to have been somewhat more experienced than the ineffective ones. This pattern is less clear for the older teachers where it can be noted that more than half of the teachers in the 50-59 age group were considered ineffective.

Table Four

Percentage of Effective and Ineffective Teachers by Educational Level

Educational Level	Effective		Ineffective		Total
	N	Percent of Column	N	Percent of Column	
Std. Seven	14	27.5%	24	46.9%	51
JCE	27	52.9%	23	49.0%	37
GCE	10	19.6%	2	4.1%	12
Totals	51	100%	49	100%	100

$p = <.05$

Whether or not it is reasonable to think that children in primary classes should know the educational level attained by their teachers is open to question. It is clear from the table, however, that a higher proportion of the effective teachers were thought by their students to have completed secondary school (i.e., obtained a GCE) than the ineffective ones, while a relatively higher number of the ineffective teachers were thought to have completed only standard seven (or primary school).

Table Five

Percentage of Effective and Ineffective Teachers by Qualification

Qualified	Effective		Ineffective		Total
	N	Percent of Column	N	Percent of Column	
Yes	45	83.3%	27	51.9%	72
No	1	1.9%	12	25.0%	14
Don't Know	8	14.8%	13	23.1%	20
Totals	54	100%	17	100%	106

$p = <.001$

Again it is unclear to what extent primary school children may be expected to know whether or not their teacher is qualified. However, it is clear from the responses that a very strong majority of the effective teachers were thought by their students to have been qualified while there was more uncertainty about the ineffective ones.

Summary of Demographic Characteristics

By way of summary, then, it can be seen from Tables One through Five that effective teachers are more likely to have been remembered as:

a) Male
b) Teaching Standard Six or Seven
c) Between the ages of 40-49
d) Better educated than their ineffective counterparts
e) More likely to be qualified than ineffective teachers

Ineffective teachers, on the other hand were more likely to be remembered as:

a) Having been either male or female

b) Teaching at Standards Four or below

c) (As a group), both somewhat younger and somewhat older than the effective ones.

d) Very unlikely to have attained the GCE

e) Likely to be unqualified.

The observed relationships would appear to provide some support for the notion that more experience (up to a point), higher levels of education and qualification as a teacher, may contribute to perceived effectiveness of teaching in Botswana. The relative preponderance of males among the effective teachers should be further explored. From the data it is impossible to determine the extent to which the response reflect social or cultural biases.

Rankings of Effective Teacher Characteristics

Respondents were requested to rank order fourteen statements which, in their opinion, contributed most to the effectiveness of the teacher which they had selected (remembered). The mean of the rankings assigned by respondents were calculated for each characteristic and combined in an overall ranking. This ranking is presented in Table Six. Since the most important characteristics were ranked beginning with one, the lower the mean for each characteristic, the more important it was considered to be.

Table Six

Mean Rankings of
Characteristics Which Contribute Most
Toward Perceived Teacher Effectiveness

Rank	Characteristic	Type of Variable	Mean Value
1	Knew Subject Well	Instruction	5.14

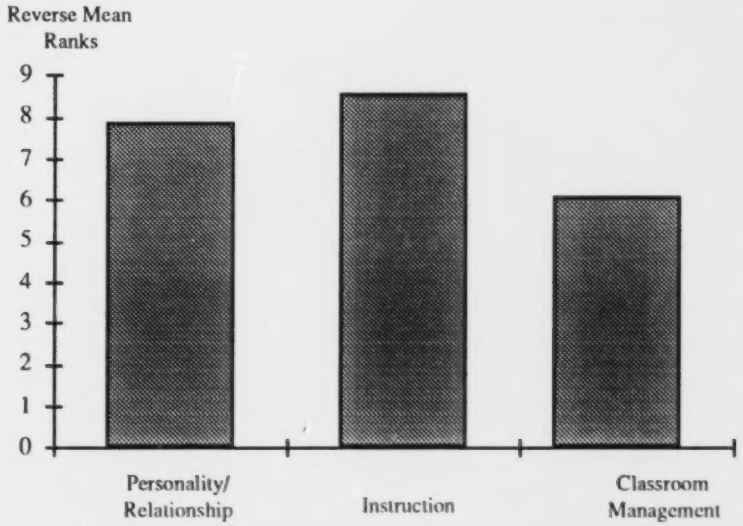
2	Had Friendly Personality	Personality/Relationship	5.35
3	Had Interesting Lessons	Instruction	5.59
4	Made Subjects Understandable	Instruction	6.37
5	Cared about Individual Students	Personality/Relationship	6.41
6	Helped Slow Learners	Instruction	6.43
7	Demanded Hard Work	Class Management	7.06
8	Helped Students Feel Good About Being in Class	Personality/Relationship	7.06
9	Had Good Class Control	Class Management	7.12
10	Related Well to Students	Personality/Relationship	7.61
11	Made Fair Evaluations	Instruction	8.73
12	Expected Good Performance of All	Personality/Relationship	9.35
13	Had Strict Discipline	Class Management	10.14
14	Was Not Too Strict	Class Management	11.45

As can be seen from the table, three of the top-ranked four characteristics have to do with how well the teacher carries out instruction in the classroom, with "knowledge of the subject matter" appearing to be particularly important. Though it was considered important that the teacher have a "good" personality, it would appear that respondents considered knowledge of the subject, along with the ability to present it understandably, to be of foremost importance in the primary school

classroom. Though important, personality and relationship factors, were nevertheless secondary. Classroom management characteristics were relegated to a fairly clear third place, overall.

The relative importance which respondents attached to the different clusters (i.e. categories) of teacher characteristics or skills are indicated by the category means (reversed, in this case so that high numbers represent high importance). Figure 1 shows the reversed mean rank of teacher characteristics by category.

FIGURE ONE
Reversed Means Ranks of Effective Teacher Characteristics by Category



It is clear, that taken together, Instructional characteristics or skills seemed to have been considered most important, with relatively low importance attached to class management skills.

Rankings of Ineffective Teacher Characteristics

The same 14 characteristics were used for consideration of factors contributing most toward making the so-identified teachers seem ineffective, except that, in most cases, the statements were framed negatively instead of positively. Where a particular statement could be

viewed as either negative or positive, it was phrased the same for both the effective and ineffective teachers. Table Seven presents the rankings for the Ineffective Teachers.

Table Seven

Mean Rankings of
Characteristics Which Contribute Most
Toward Perceived Teacher Ineffectiveness

Rank	Characteristic	Type of Variable	Mean Value
1	Unfriendly Personality	Personality/Relationship	4.96
2	Did Not Make Students Feel Good About Being in Class	Personality/Relationship	5.45
3	Uninteresting Lessons	Instruction	5.80
4	No Help For Slow Learners	Instruction	5.84
5	Made Subjects Understandable	Instruction	5.88
6	Did Not Care about Individual Students	Personality/Relationship	6.06
7	Did Not Relate Well to Students	Personality/Relationship	6.84
8	Did Not Know Subject Well	Instruction	7.63
9	Had Strict Discipline	Class Management	8.22
10	Had Poor Class Control	Class Management	8.26
11	Was Not Too Strict	Class Management	9.44
12	Unfair Evaluations	Instruction	9.61
13	Did Not Expect Good Performance of All	Personality/Relationship	9.96

14	Demanded Hard Work	Class Management	10.28

It can be seen that in comparison to the mean rankings for effective teachers there was somewhat more agreement (i.e. a lower mean value) on the single most important characteristic contributing to perceived ineffectiveness -- having an "unfriendly personality". Both of the two highest ranked (i.e. the two most important contributary factors) were characteristics related to Personality/Relationship. The one characteristic considered to contribute most to being an ineffective teacher (having an unfriendly personality) was the same (but of course in the opposite direction) as the one which was ranked second in the effective teachers ranking. Knowledge of the subject (actually *lack* of knowledge of the subject) was ranked 8th for ineffective teachers in contrast to the top ranking it received in the effective teachers. In general, it would appear that ineffective teaching was more likely to be perceived in terms personality and relationship than in instruction.

The reversed means of the rankings by category for Ineffectiveness are shown in Figure Two.

FIGURE TWO
Reversed Means Ranks of Ineffective Teacher Characteristics by Category

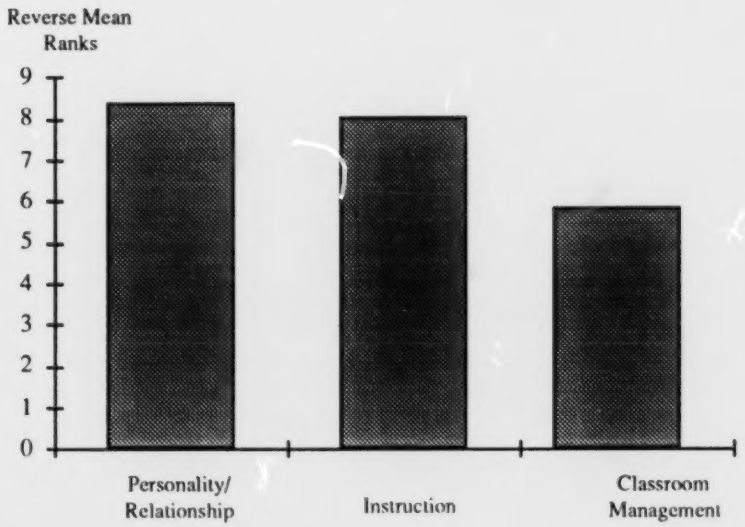


Figure 2 appears to support the conclusion that, for these respondents, the most important category of characteristics contributing toward ineffectiveness is the Personality/Relationship one but followed closely by Instruction.

Comparison and Summary of Findings From Rankings

Though the mean rankings of characteristics contributing to ineffective teaching are not necessarily the same as those which were believed to contribute to effective teaching, there are, nevertheless, notable similarities. Many of the "effective" characteristics are the same ones, which, by their absence or negative demonstration, contribute toward "ineffectiveness". A more systematic comparison of mean rankings was done by translating each of the characteristics into it's common designation (i.e. disregarding the negative or positive direction of the statements) and calculating a Spearman Rank Order correlation. This resulted in a rho of .61, confirming the observation of the tendency for similar factors to be considered important in terms of their contribution toward being seen as either an effective or ineffective teacher.

Of the fourteen characteristics included, significant (unpaired t-test) differences between mean rankings were found for five: "Requiring Hard

Work" (p = .001: more important for effective teachers), "Exercising Strict Discipline" (p = < .05: more important for ineffective teachers), "Not Being Too Strict" (p = < .01: more important for effective teachers), "Knowing the Subject Well" (p =<.01: more important for effective teachers) and "Making Students Feel Good About Being in Class" (p. <.05: more important for effective teachers).

In summary, it seems clear from the rankings that effective teachers were perceived, first of all, as knowledgeable about their subject matter and able to teach well. Having good personality and relationship skills are also important though it is by their absence that they appear to contribute toward a perception of *in*effectiveness. Respondents appeared to consider instructional skills to be primary contributors toward effectiveness, while negative personality and relationship skills contribute toward ineffectiveness.

Open Ended Comments

Following the ranking exercises, respondents were invited to write comments about "one or two things" which in their opinion contributed most to making the remembered teachers effective or ineffective. The open-ended comments indicated appeared to converge into thirteen different ideas for both effective and ineffective teachers. These are presented in rank order in Tables Eight and Nine along with the number of times each was mentioned. Since not all respondents completed this section the results are based on those who did so.

Table Eight

Open Ended Comments About Effective Teachers

Comment	Number of Times Mentioned
Friendly and cheerful. (created good atmosphere; helpful)	15
Related well to students (developed good relationships, caring, was trusted, made students feel good)	13
Good planning, preparation and design of lessons (lessons were creative, interesting)	9
Knows/Uses good teaching methods (motivated students well)	6
Helped slow learners (interested in remediation, took time for slow pupils)	5
Was motivated and dedicated (loved his/her work, punctual, conscientious)	4
Was knowledgeable about the subject taught	4
Had good class control (firm, strict)	4
Had high expectations (wanted/demanded good work)	2
Patient	2
Fair and just	2
Recognized differences in individual ability	2
Participated in intramurals	1

It is clear that many of the open ended comments about characteristics of effective teachers are similar to those which were included in the ranking exercises. In contrast to the ranked statements, however, personality and relationship variables were clearly mentioned more often than instructional ones. While more respondents considered instructional characteristics most important for effective teaching when

given the task of *ranking* (i.e. choosing from a given set of alternatives), personality and relationship characteristics were apparently more likely to come to mind when asked for a free response.

Table Nine

Open Ended Comments About Ineffective Teachers

Comment	Number of Times Mentioned
Neglected their work/ Were not dedicated	12
Poor planning, preparation and execution of lessons (unprepared, bad judgement [about methodology], dull lessons, uninteresting teaching)	11
Excessively strict or harsh (bullied students, used a stick, shouted, beat students)	9
Neglected or downgraded slow learners	9
Unfriendly (cross, short tempered)	7
Didn't know or use good teaching methods	4
Was not knowledgeable about the subject	4
Did not establish relationships with individual students (wasn't able to establish rapport, didn't care about individual students)	3
Didn't recognize individual differences (thought there was only one level of student)	3
Usually tired, sleepy or drunk	3
Poor explanations (students didn't understand, couldn't teach difficult topics)	2
Poor classroom control (lacked discipline)	1
Showed favoritism	1

As with the free responses about effective teachers, the free responses about ineffective teachers contains many of the same characteristics that were included in the ranking exercise, but are again arranged differently. Most frequently cited as contributors to ineffectiveness were poor work habits and poor instruction, while discipline, (along with concern for slow learners) was in third place though it was considerably less important in the structured rankings.

How to understand the differences in importance which emerged between the structured rankings of teacher characteristics and the free responses is not immediately obvious. The differences are particularly interesting, in light of the fact that similar factors emerged from both exercises, but in a changed order of importance. It may be that the differences between the rankings and the free responses are related to differences in the mental processes of recall versus recognition. It is conceivable, for example, that the task of choosing between alternatives as in the structured ranking may involve an essentially cognitive and logical process -- drawing upon a personal knowledge base about what makes good teaching -- whereas the free responses, on the other hand, may involve a more emotive process in which personal *feelings* about individual teachers become more important. Such reasoning is, of course, highly speculative at best and requires much additional investigation.

Summary

Several generalizations can be made on the basis of the findings.

1. Characteristics of Effective Teachers

    a). Based on the structured rankings, it would appear that subject knowledge and general instructional skill are perceived as important contributors toward being considered an effective teacher by Botswana respondents, while personality characteristics, though important, are

nevertheless considered to be second place. Characteristics having to do with class room management and discipline appear to be less important.

b) On the other hand, when considering the free responses, personality and relationship variables (including caring about individual students, establishing a good classroom atmosphere and making students feel good about being in class, among other things) appear to be perceived as major contributors toward effectiveness. Good instruction was less important in this response mode, being mentioned only nine times in comparison to the fifteen times personality-related characteristics were mentioned.

2. Characteristics of Ineffective Teachers

a) The structured rankings suggest that personality characteristics and the inability to make students feel good about being in their class were major contributors toward teachers being considered ineffective. The absence of good instructional skills such as the ability to present interesting lessons, or to make difficult subjects understandable also appeared to be important but secondary to the more personal characteristics. Problems with discipline and class management skills were generally placed in the bottom half of the rankings.

b) The free responses, on the other hand, suggest that poor professional performance (i.e. poor work habits, poor planning and lesson preparation) were among the greatest contributors to being considered ineffective. Personality or relationship characteristics were mentioned less often, though class management problems received the least mention of all.

3. General

a) It was observed that structured rankings of the characteristics of effective and ineffective teachers will not necessarily produce the same results as free responses. The reason for the disparity is not clear, though a highly speculative may be that the former (i.e. structured ranking) tends to be more cognitive (i.e. a *thinking* response), while the latter may be more impressionistic and emotive (i.e.a *feeling* response). The methodological implications of this observation need to be explored further.

In general, the findings suggest that knowledge of the subject and being able to present good lessons are, for these Botswana respondents, the *sine qua non* of good teaching. On the other hand, the absence of appropriate personality or relationship skills, would appear to preclude, for these respondents, the perception of instructional competence.

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